

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 9513

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, EC

SUBJECT: GOE PLAN FOR INSTITUTIONALIZATION: REACTION TO
PRESIDENT'S GUAYAQUIL SPEECH

REF: A) QUITO 9296 B) QUITO 9483

1. SUMMARY: THE PRESIDENT'S DEC 19 SPEECH, WHICH CONTAINED THE FIRST SPECIFIC DETAILS ABOUT THE GOE'S PLANS FOR "INSTITUTIONALIZATION," HAS DRAWN MIXED REVIEWS FROM THE PRESS AND POLITICAL PARTIES. QUITO'S EL TIEMPO HAS PUBLISHED SPECIFIC POINTS OF WHAT IT SAYS IS THE GOVERNMENT'S PLAN. IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE PLAN HAS NOT BEEN CAST IN ITS FINAL FORM AND THAT IT COULD BE MODIFIED UP UNTIL ITS SCHEDULED ANNOUNCEMENT ON FEB 16. CURRENTLY THE QUESTIONS OF HOW LONG THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT PLANS TO CONTINUE IN POWER AND OF SUBMITTING THE CONSTITUTION TO A PLEBISCITE ARE THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION. MORE COMMENT AND SPECULATION ABOUT THE PLAN CAN BE EXPECTED UNTIL ITS ANNOUNCEMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. SPEAKING AT THE NAVAL ACADEMY GRADUATION EXERCISES IN GUAYAQUIL DEC 19, PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ LARA SAID THAT THE PLAN FOR "INSTITUTIONALIZATION" BEING PREPARED BY HIS GOVERNMENT COMPRISED THREE DOCUMENTS; A LAW GOVERNING PARTIES, AN ELECTORAL LAW AND A CONSTITUTION WHICH WOULD BE SUBMITTED

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AFTER STUDY AND PREPARATION TO A POPULAR PLEBISCITE. THE

PRESIDENT SAID HE WOULD CONSULT ON THE CONSTITUTION WITH NOTABLE JURISTS, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES, AND SOCIAL/POLITICAL SECTORS. THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH WAS THE FIRST REVELATION OF SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE MUCH MENTIONED AND LONG ADMITTED PLAN. HE PROMISED FULL DISCLOSURE ON FEB 16, THE FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS GOVERNMENT. CONCOMITANT WITH THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH WAS A PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT IN WHICH HE CHALLENGED PARTIES TO PREPARE THEMSELVES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROCESS OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION. THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH AND MINISTER AYALA'S COMMENT CONTINUE TO EVOKE COMMENTARY, MOSTLY CRITICAL, BY BOTH THE PRESS AND THE POLITICAL PARTIES.

3. THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS STIMULATED MUCH SPECULATION ABOUT THE CONTENT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S PLAN; PARTICULARLY ABOUT HOW MUCH LONGER THE ECUADOREAN MILITARY INTENDED TO MAINTAIN THE REINS OF POWER. EL TIEMPO'S EDITIONS OF DEC 26 AND 27 REPORTED WHAT THE PAPERS CLAIMED WERE SPECIFIC POINTS IN THE GOVERNMENT'S "INSTITUTIONALIZATION" PLAN: (A) THE COMPLETE PLAN WILL BE ANNOUNCED FEB 16, 1976, AND THERE WILL BE A POLITICAL AMNESTY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN EXILED OR ARRESTED FOR POLITICAL ACTIVITIES; (B) PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD IN NOV, 1977, AND THE ELECTED PRESIDENT WILL TAKE OFFICE FEB 16, 1978, ON THE SIXTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT; (C) THE GOVERNMENT WILL ALLOW THE FORMATION OF THREE POLITICAL PARTIES (AFTER FEB, 1976) I.E., PARTIES OF THE LEFT, CENTER AND RIGHT. THE PARTIES WILL HAVE TO HAVE A MINIMUM OF 250,000 AFFILIATES TO EARN RECOGNITION; (D) THERE WILL BE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN JUNE, 1977 AS WELL AS ELECTIONS FOR A NATIONAL UNICAMERAL CONGRESS; (E) NO FORMER PRESIDENT WILL BE ALLOWED TO SEEK THE OFFICE AGAIN AND ONLY THOSE BORN IN ECUADOR OF ECUADOREAN PARENTS SHALL BE ELIGIBLE FOR OFFICE. THERE IS NO WAY OF KNOWING IF THE POINTS PUBLISHED BY EL TIEMPO ARE THE SAME AS THOSE THAT WILL BE ANNOUNCED BY THE PRESIDENT ON FEB 16, BUT THEY HAVE BEEN PICKED UP AND REPEATED BY OTHER NEWS MEDIA. AND SOME POINTS COINCIDE WITH REPORTS WE HAVE HAD FROM VARIOUS SOURCES.

4. AMONG THOSE PUBLICLY BLESSING THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS WITH QUALIFIED APPROVAL WAS THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY
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(LED BY OSWALDO HURTADO). THE PARTY, IN A PAID AD ON DEC 23, APPLAUDED THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT THAT THE POLITICAL PARTIES WOULD PARTICIPATE IN REVIEWING THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSED DOCUMENTS BUT SAID THAT SUBMISSION OF A NEW CONSTITUTION TO A PLEBISCITE WAS NOT THE WAY TO PROCEED. THE CHRISTIAN-DEMOCRATS INSTEAD PROPOSED THAT ONE OF THE FORMER CONSTITUTIONS BE SELECTED AND THAT AMENDMENTS SHOULD BE REFERRED TO A PLEBISCITE. THE PARTY CONCLUDED

ITS DECLARATION BY CALLING ON THE GOE TO SHOW GOOD FAITH ABOUT ITS INTENTION TO RESTORE DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT BY GRANTING COMPLETE AMNESTY TO ALL POLITICIANS NOW EXILED OR SOUGHT FOR ARREST.

5. ALTHOUGH THE CHRISTIAN-DEMOCRATS RECEIVED THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS WITH MILD APPROVAL, BOTH THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT (IZQUIERDA DEMOCRATICA) AND THE CONSERVATIVES HAVE REGISTERED PUBLICLY THEIR OPPOSITION. THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT REPEATED ITS PROPOSAL FOR A TRANSITIONAL CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT AND, WHILE NOT OPPOSING THE PLEBISCITE IN ITSELF, WAS AGAINST ITS USE BY THE "DICTATORSHIP." WITHOUT DETAILING ITS OBJECTIONS THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY ECHOED THE VIEWS OF THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT BY DEMANDING A JOINT MILITARY-CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE RESUMPTION OF FULL DEMOCRACY. THE CONSERVATIVES STATED THE NECESSARY FIRST STEP IN THE TRANSITIONAL PROCESS WAS REMOVAL OF PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ.

6. MEMBERS OF THE CIVILIAN OPPOSITION INFORMED AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT AFTER THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH, PLANS WERE UNDERWAY FOR PARTIES OF THE RIGHT, CENTER AND LEFT TO SIGN A JOINT MANIFESTO CALLING FOR RAPID RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE. THIS WAS MOTIVATED BY THE WIDELY ACCEPTED BELIEF THAT THE MILITARY REGIME INTENDED TO ANNOUNCE ON FEB 16 ITS CONTINUANCE IN POWER FOR TWO MORE YEARS IN ORDER TO OVERSEE IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS PLAN. EFFORTS WERE ALSO IN PROCESS TO OBTAIN THE SIGNED ENDORSEMENT OF ALL LIVING EX-PRESIDENTS TO A SIMILAR MANIFESTO. THE LATEST WORD WAS THAT BOTH THESE EFFORTS HAD FAILED DUE TO DIVISION AND JEALOUSIES AMONG THE POLITICIANS, ALTHOUGH IT IS REMOTELY POSSIBLE THAT A JOINT PARTY MANIFESTO DEALING WITH THE RETURN TO CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT WILL EVENTUALLY EMERGE.

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7. EDITORIAL REACTION TO THE PRESIDENT'S PROPOSALS WAS SURPRISINGLY SCANT, ALTHOUGH A NUMBER OF COLUMNISTS HAVE COMMENTED. THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT EDITORIAL APPEARED IN EL COMERCIO, QUITO'S HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL DAILY, ON DEC 21, AND SAID THE PLAN APPEARED TO OPEN THE POSSIBILITIES FOR A PEACEFUL ROAD TO A CONSTITUTIONAL REGIME. ITS MAJOR EMPHASIS WAS ON REFORM OF THE POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEM, HOWEVER, NOTING THAT "THROUGH THE YEARS THOUSANDS OF CITIZENS, MANY OF THEM OF GREAT RESPECT AND PRESTIGE, WERE OUTSIDE THE PARTY SYSTEM," BECAUSE THE PARTIES FAILED TO "INFUSE CONFIDENCE OR HOPE."

8. THE PROPOSAL FOR A PLEBISCITE CAME UNDER ATTACK BY SEVERAL COLUMNISTS. THEY HAVE POINTED OUT THAT A PLEBISCITE REQUIRED APPROVAL OF THE ENTIRE DOCUMENT, ELIMINATING THE POSSIBILITY OF AMENDING OR REJECTING PORTIONS OF THE PROPOSAL. OBJECTIONS

ALSO MENTIONED ARE ECUADOR'S LACK OF EXPERIENCE WITH A PLEBISCITE, THE INABILITY OF A SEMI-LITERATE PUBLIC TO VOTE ON SUCH A COMPLICATED MATTER, AND THAT IF THE VOTE WERE NEGATIVE THERE IS NO PROVISION FOR THE NEXT STEP.

9. ON THE OTHER SIDE, HOWEVER, HUMBERTO VACAS GOMEZ, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF EL COMERCIO, IN A SIGNED COLUMN ON DEC 30 SAID THE PRESIDENT'S IDEA OF A PLEBISCITE HAD "TACIT CONSENSUS OF APPROVAL" DESPITE CRITICISMS LEVIED AGAINST IT. SURPRISINGLY, OPPOSITIONIST EL TIEMPO COLUMNIST JULIO PRADO, A FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER, SAID A PLEBISCITE WOULD STRENGTHEN THE NATION'S REPUBLICAN INSTITUTIONS, ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT SAY PRECISELY HOW THIS WOULD BE ACHIEVED. ALFREDO PINOARGOTE WRITING IN EL UNIVERSO ON DEC 29 ALSO CONCLUDED THAT THE IDEA OF A NEW CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER HAD MAJORITY CONSENSUS.

10. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH EL TIEMPO HAS OBTAINED WHAT IT PURPORTS TO BE THE PLAN, WE DOUBT THAT THE PLAN'S EXACT CONTENT HAS BEEN FINALLY DETERMINED AND BELIEVE THAT THE PRESIDENT COULD MODIFY ELEMENTS OF IT RIGHT UP TO THE MOMENT HE DELIVERS HIS FOURTH ANNIVERSARY ADDRESS, DEPENDING UPON WHAT HE THINKS TO BE POLITICALLY EXPEDIENT AND ACCEPTABLE. THE MOST DISCUSSED ASPECTS AT THIS TIME ARE HOW LONG THE TRANSITION PERIOD UNDER MILITARY RULE WILL ENDURE, THE DEGREE OF CONSULTATION TO BE HELD ON THE CONSTITUTION, AND THE APPROPRIATENESS OF THE PLEBISCITE. OTHER POINTS, ESPECIALLY THE PARTY STRUCTURE, WILL UNDOUBTEDLY

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ATTRACT MUCH DISCUSSION. WE EXPECT COMMENT AND SPECULATION ABOUT THE PRESIDENT'S PLAN FOR INSTITUTIONALIZATION TO INCREASE AS FEB 16 APPROACHES.

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